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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000948

SIPDIS
AIDAC
SENSITIVE

DEPT FO AF/W, AF/RSA, EEB/TPP/MTAA/ABT, AND AF/PDPA
DEPT PLS PASS USAID/AFR/WA - PHUBBARD, TLAVELLE, KTOWERS
OFDA/W FOR CCHAN, ACONVERY, FSHANKS, MSHIRLEY, JMCINTOSH
FFP/W FOR JBORNS, JDWORKEN, RHUDSON, SGILBERT
ACCRA FOR USAID/AFR/WA LFRANCHETTE
DAKAR FOR RDAVIS AND ZSEMUNEGUS
GENEVA FOR NKYLOH
ROME FOR US MISSION
BRUSSELS FOR USAID PBROWN
NSC FOR CPRATT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [NG](#)

SUBJECT: NIGER: USAID/OFDA PROGRAM MONITORING TRIP KEY FINDINGS

REF: A) NIAMEY 813 B) NIAMEY 862

1. (SBU) Summary: October 26 to November 2, 2009 field observations by USAID/Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) Acting Senior Program Officer from across the three most easterly regions of Niger revealed that cereal prices remain high, harvests are poor or non-existent, pasturage is very bad, and local authorities are fearful of openly discussing the severity of the situation. USAID/OFDA makes recommendations to mitigate the developing food security and nutritional crisis. End summary.

Key Indicators of Food Insecurity Manifest

2. (SBU) From October 26 to November 2, 2009, USAID/OFDA staff monitored USAID/OFDA-funded nutrition and high food price crisis response programs in Diffa, Maradi, and Zinder regions. Through observations and discussions throughout the trip with non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, program beneficiaries, health staff, community and local authorities, and others, USAID/OFDA identified four key elements of the unfolding food security crisis: 1) cereal prices remain as high as at any similar previous time period; 2) late and insufficient rains have caused failed or deficit harvests; 3) pasture deficits in 2008 and again in 2009 have resulted in significant agro-pastoralist community migrations to seek new pastures; and 4) local authorities, already seized with the problem, fear speaking out on behalf of affected communities due to a challenging and threatening political environment. (Note: Although villages in these regions often tend to suffer food insecurity due to extreme poverty and erratic rains, any shock such as the current failed harvest has profoundly negative effects on families' already fragile coping strategies. For many affected communities, the 2009 deficit harvests, estimated to be 40 percent across Niger, may herald a period as exceptionally food-insecure as those in 1998 or 2004/2005. End note.)

Local Officials Discreetly Express Concerns

3. (SBU) In closed-door meetings with USAID/OFDA staff, local officials in Maradi, Zinder, and Diffa regions described the deficit

or failed harvest as a crisis and appealed for assistance. Underscoring the severity of the situation, local officials made such statements despite fears of censure or retaliation should the central government, which asserts that the 2009 harvest was reasonable, find out that local officials disagreed.

Maradi Offers Many Reports of Increasing Food Insecurity

¶4. (SBU) In Maradi Region, a regional agricultural official reported that five of the region's seven districts were suffering alarming food deficits, whereas communities in the two other districts would likely "get by," if only barely. However, a woman's association in Djiratawa commune, located in one of the two districts the regional official thought would "get by," reported to USAID/OFDA staff that women had harvested only one month's supply of food in 2009, significantly less than the previous year.

¶5. (SBU) In Maradi's Tessaoua District, the traditional leader categorized the failed harvest as a crisis causing migration, and stated that local authorities are powerless to respond to the rapidly deteriorating conditions. At the time of the monitoring trip, 41 percent of villages in the district were suffering from agricultural production deficits and consequently members of affected communities were already migrating at very high rates.

¶6. (SBU) Also in Tessaoua District, Majirguri village, elders estimated that 30 percent of the villagers, including entire families, had migrated since families had neither been able to harvest their own food nor earn cash by working in others' fields. In previous years, only breadwinners would migrate, typically to seek employment in urban areas such as Maradi or across the border

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in northern Nigeria. Driving the migrations are not only failed harvests and lack of cash with which to buy the food still available in the markets, but also inadequate fodder for livestock.

¶7. (SBU) In Maradi Region, Aguié District, the Save the Children pediatrician working with inpatient malnutrition cases at the district hospital reported treating significantly more cases this year than last year. In addition, Save the Children staff commented that while mothers are normally happy when their cured children are released, mothers have of late often expressed sadness or discouragement when the child is released from hospital, since there is little food at home.

Diffa Food Insecurity Leading to Destocking and Migration

¶8. (SBU) Similarly, in Issari Kassoum village, Mainé-Soroa District, Diffa Region, women who last year harvested gumbo (okra), peanuts, and millet reported not having sufficient food this year to feed families for even one month. Women in the village are coping with the current crisis by decreasing the number of meals eaten and selling livestock. In addition, heads of households, and sometimes whole families, are migrating from the village. In DiQ Region, 80 percent of the population depends on livestock for livelihoods. In a visit to Kabelawa village, N'Guigmi District, near the border with Chad, USAID/OFDA staff learned from the village health officer that 50 percent of villagers had already migrated. USAID/OFDA staff observed groups of pastoralists and camels migrating south in search of pasture approximately four months earlier than usual. In addition, the failed harvests have raised concerns regarding potentially increased acute malnutrition.

Recommendations Stemming from Field Trip

¶9. (SBU) Following the monitoring trip, USAID/OFDA suggests the USG consider the following in order to mitigate the developing food security and nutrition crisis: 1) increase contributions to the ready-to-eat therapeutic food pipeline; 2) increase efforts to detect and respond to acute malnutrition; and 3) consider seriously cash transfers, vouchers, and other livelihood initiatives through current UN and NGO partners to mitigate against food insecurity in areas suffering from a deficit in agricultural production.

